

Lapse by Yikes_Writes

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Summary:

The first time Robin noticed it, Steve was helping a customer at Family Video.

He was in the middle of a sentence, i the middle of a transaction behind the register when his eyes drifted up towards the ceiling and his voice trailed off. His jaw shifted around and he chewed on his tongue.

It was like he was completely vacant.

It lasted a few seconds, and he snapped back in, finishing his sentence and continuing the transaction like nothing happened.

Steve's been having seizures.

Lapse

Author's Note:

My biggest ever thanks to @elysiumwaits and @a-bit-of-trash on tumblr for providing me with inspiration and help for this story!

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The customer stared questioningly at Robin, and she smiled tightly at her, waving as she threw Steve one last confused look and turned to leave.

“Uh, Steve?” Steve looked over his shoulder to her, humming in question. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Why?”

“You, like, kinda went blank there. Like stopped talking for awhile and just. I don’t know, it was weird.” He furrowed his brows.

“What?”

“Yeah. You just kinda. I don’t even know how to describe it.” She was beginning to get *nervous*, if Steve just blacked out or something, and

had no idea he did it, that can't be *good*. "Has that happened before?"

"I have no idea. I mean, I didn't even know it happened just now." His voice was doing that thing it does before he gets in over his head. His pitch gets higher and his voice waivers a bit and his eyes go wide, and *usually*, this display ends with a panic attack.

"Hey, heyheyheyhey, *hey*. I'm sure it's okay." She tried to smile at him. She really *isn't* sure it's okay. But she can't let him think his blank-out scared her.

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The next time she saw it, she was sitting across from him on his couch, both their backs against either armrest, her feet in Steve's lap.

Steve was in the middle of a story about Dustin, something silly he did earlier that day.

When his eyes fluttered. He stopped speaking mid-sentence again, his eyes fluttering oddly, his jaw working once again.

It was only a few seconds when he snapped back, picking up his story right where he left off.

"Steve, it happened again."

Steve's face fell.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. You stopped talking and kinda went blank. Just the same as last time." She kept her voice even, didn't want to scare him. But he began chewing on his bottom lip, his brows furrowing.

"I didn't even know. I don't know they're happening. Do you think they happen often? And I just have no fucking idea?"

"I really don't know, Steve." And maybe her misstep was the lack of a condescending but *endearing* nickname.

Because Steve looked about a second from bursting into tears.

“Should I, like, go to the doctor? I mean, I’ve had a *lot* of concussions these past few years. It could be, like, my brain slowly turning to Jell-O.”

“Or maybe it’s nothing!” She said quickly. “If you decide to go to the doctor, I’ll come with you.”

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It happened three times in the waiting room of the doctor’s office.

Each time like the last, a few seconds of Steve blanking out and his mind going elsewhere.

It was beginning to *really* fucking scare Robin. He already wasn’t the *brightest*, and now he has these lapses, these momentary blank outs that were beginning to take more of a toll.

He was having several a day that she knew of, and by the evening, Steve was sapped of all his energy, and so fucking *confused*, he would lose his train of thought before it even left the station.

“Alright, Mr. Harrington. What brings you in today?” Doctor Owens let himself into the room, taking a seat at the stool next to the examination table Steve was perched on.

“Uh, my doctor referred me. I’m having some, like, *issues*, I guess.” He looked expectantly at Robin. She sighed through her nose.

“He has lapses. He could be in the middle of a sentence, and he’ll stop speaking. Usually his eyes will drift and after a few seconds, he’s back.”

Doctor Owens was nodding at her seriously.

“Alright Steven. Do you black out for these episodes? Lose time?”

“I don’t even notice they’ve happened.”

“And anything else with them? Headaches? Confusion?”

“He gets confused if he’s had several in a day. I was with him one

evening when he had five and by the time we fell asleep he wasn't speaking clearly and couldn't remember some things."

Owens too a deep breath.

"I'd like to run some testing. It sounds like you're experiencing minor seizures."

Steve gawked at him.

"Seizures? But I mean, I haven't been, like, it's just a little, a little, brain glitch."

"There are many different forms of seizures. And some can result in, confusion, black outs, and momentary lapses. They're called absence seizures. And it sounds like, the number you've been having is indicative of epilepsy, but I'd like to run some more tests before saying one way or another." He drummed briefly on the examination table, smiling and nodding at Robin before letting himself back out of the room.

Steve was staring at the wall in front of him.

"Seizures. Epilepsy."

"Hey," Robin leaned forward in her chair, placing one hand on his forearm. "At least it's an answer. Diagnoses bring treatment."

He gave her those big round puppy dog eyes that always made her heart break a little bit.

"Robin, I'm scared."

It was barely a whisper, and Steve's hands closed into shaking fists, clenching the fabric of his flimsy gown.

"I know. I know it's scary. But I'm here, right? And we've dealt with *a lot* scarier than your brain electricity."

He nodded at her shakily.

Doctor Owens returned then.

“Alright, Steven. We’re going to schedule you in for tomorrow for an EEG, a simple test to measure brain activity. It’ll give us a great view of what is happening in that head ‘a yours. Frankly, it’d be great if you had an event while doing the test. But, we’ll just see what’s going on in there, and figure out how to help you. That sound alright?”

“Uh, yes, Doctor. Thank you.”

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The phone was ringing loudly by the time Steve pushed open the front door.

He had been quiet as Robin drove him home, and he had another small *seizure* in the car.

He picked up the phone, and she placed one hand gently on the small of his back as she passed by him into the kitchen.

“Hey, Dad.”

Robin sighed. This was the *last* thing they needed today. A call from Steve’s asshole father.

“Yeah, I had to use the credit card at the doctor. I’m having some testing done. No, not, Dad just *listen*. I might have *epilepsy*.” Steve’s voice cracked when he said *epilepsy*. He went quiet. Robin chewed on her bottom lip. “Just put Mom on, please.”

Robin was standing just on the other side of the doorway, listening intently. Steve always just *assumed* she was eavesdropping on his conversations.

“Hi, Mom. Yeah, the doctor said it could be epilepsy. I mean, I have like, a bunch of seizures. Been having them for *months* now. And I’m just- I mean, can you,” he went silent, no doubt listening to his mother speak.

It was a few minutes of silence before he spoke again.

And dear God, she really thought she was gonna fucking *cry*.

“Mom, can you please just come home? I have a big test tomorrow and I’m. I’m just *scared*. And I want my mom.”

And then more silence. And Steve sniffed.

“Yeah, no, uh, it’s okay. No really, Mom. I’m okay. I’ll be-enjoy the rest of your trip.” There was a click as he set the phone down on the receiver.

She waited for him to show around the wall, let him take a moment to himself.

He slunk around the divider, not meeting Robin’s gaze.

“I assume-”

“We don’t have to talk about it,” she cut him off quickly.

“Thanks.”

And they didn’t.

They didn’t talk about the looming appointment the next day, the hours of testing Steve was going to have to sit through.

They didn’t talk about the way his mom didn’t bother to even pretend she would come to support him through his nerves.

They talked about shit that didn’t matter- awful costumers at Family Video, Keith repeatedly asking robin out and never getting the hint she wasn’t into him, they even unpacked the entirety of the Star Wars trilogy, as Steve fell asleep nearly every time they tried to watch it.

Steve hugged her tight before she drove herself home in her mom’s old station wagon. He did that thing he does where he buries his face into her shoulder and takes a real big breath and kinda seems like Robin’s the only thing keeping him together, kissing the top of her head once before she pulled away.

He woke up groggy, a spot of drool on his pillow. The phone was blaring on his nightstand, and he barely rolled over to slam it against his ear.

“ello?”

“Steve, oh my God. I’m so so sorry,” Robin babbled into the receiver, barely breathing as she hurled her words at him. “I got called in to cover for Amanda today, and Keith said he’s called everyone, and if I can’t work today, he’s gonna call you, and you can’t miss the test, but I feel like such *shit*, I promised I’d come with you, and with your mom not coming in, I said I’d drive you, and now I can’t, and Steve, I’m so sorry-” she sounded frantic, almost like she was close to tears.

“Rob, hey, it’s alright.” It wasn’t. Not *really*, but he understands. And he’s a grown up, after all. He can go to the doctor by himself. “It’s okay. Just come over tonight if you want to.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll be over right after I get off. Maybe Amanda can come relieve me or something. I’m so sorry.”

She *sounded* sorry. She sounded absolutely *miserable*.

“Rob, honest, no hard feelings. I can just go. I’ll be okay. See you after.”

“I’ll bring dinner! Or, or snacks, and I can bring a few movies with me afterwards-”

“That sounds great. Look, I gotta go take a shower and get ready. I’ll just, I’ll see you later. After the-the *thing*.”

“Yes! Yeah, Steve, really I’m so so sorry.”

“I know. Don’t worry. I’ll see you later, Rob. Love you.” He scrubbed a hand down his face, melting further back into his pillows.

“I’ll be there! And I love you a whole lot, okay?”

“Yeah. I know. It’s really okay. I promise.”

He didn’t let her get another word in, slapping the phone back onto the hook.

Really, he had no hard feelings. It’s not worth it to be mad at her for this. He just doesn’t want to sit on the phone with her while she

apologizes some more

It just fucking sucks.

He's fairly certain he had a seizure in the shower. He doesn't *totally* know when he has them, but he's beginning to recognize the time passing, the way he just feels *tired* after.

He took his sweet time getting ready, dreading the impending appointment and all the *testing*, making sure to wear comfortable clothes, hoping they wouldn't make him swap out his soft crew neck sweatshirt for a flimsy hospital gown while he sat through everything that was about to happen.

And only when he got outside did it really hit him that Robin won't be going with him.

Owens said to avoid driving until they could find out more about his episodes. Find an epicenter and maybe a *trigger*. It's dangerous as all hell to have him blanking out on the road. Which is something Robin suggested in that overly calm voice of hers when the seizures started getting more frequent.

Robin's been driving him everywhere the past few weeks. And she was going to pick him up for the appointment.

Fuck.

He has no one to call.

Well, he *could* call someone, but that would take all the energy of explaining all the shit he hasn't told anyone yet about his *issues*, and that's a can of worms he doesn't feel ready for on a Thursday morning.

Claudia would only ask more questions than he had answers, and he doesn't think he could stand seeing that sad look Nancy's always got on her face when she sees him nowadays.

And he doesn't think things *won't* be awkward between him and Jonathan.

Okay.

Looks like he's gonna drive himself.

He actually buckled himself in, something he almost *never* did, and took everything as slowly as possible, creeping down his neighborhood at an almost comical pace.

If he has a seizure, and blanks out for a few seconds, he wants to be able to mitigate any damage. Either stop himself from going too far in the first place, or give others enough time to move out of the way from his slow moving death machine.

His grip was so tight on the steering wheel his knuckles were white, hands clammy and no doubt shaking.

"Just *breathe*, Stevie. You're doing just fine. Plenty of time to get there." He hadn't turned on the radio, wanted to keep a laser focus on the road. "You're not going to blank out, and you're not going to hurt anyone."

He kept up that monologue as he made the slowest left-turn possible onto the road that led into town.

He had the overwhelming urge to bounce his leg, trying to keep himself still and focused.

And the next thing he knows, he's idling at a stop sign with the Chief of Police knocking on his window.

Fuck.

At least he didn't hurt anyone, or crash his car horribly.

He cranked down the window, giving Hop as much of a smile as he could muster.

"Kid, what the fuck? I've been tapping on that window for a full minute. You were just, sittin' there."

Shit. He's gonna have to come clean.

"I, uh, I'm actually going to an appointment. With Owens." Hopper just continued staring at him, his face gruff, his brows drawn. "I got some. Brain stuff."

And then Hopper's face fell.

"Shit, why didn't you let any of us know?"

"Because, well, they don't know what it is yet, but I, uh, I've been having, like, seizures," Steve could feel it, the lump rising in his throat he's been ignoring since yesterday, the nerves and sadness and confusion all welling up. "And Owens is gonna run some tests because he thinks I have epilepsy now, from being *tortured*, and I don't know what's happening to me, but it's like I can't even control my own stupid brain, and I'm so fucking *scared*, and-"

This is fucking mortifying.

Sitting in his car, *crying*, in front of Hopper.

Who looked like he had no idea what the fuck to do.

"Okay, uh, just take some deep breaths, okay? Why don't you, uh, go get in my truck, and I'll take you to the appointment. I can leave your car parked over there," he pointed at the side of the road beyond the stop sign. "You don't seem in much shape to be drivin'."

"Sorry, I'm not-not supposed to, but I had no one to call-"

"Hey, I hope you now that's not true." Hopper reached through the window to place a firm hand on Steve's shoulder. "I'll take you, and I'll drive you on home after." And he opened up the door, and Steve nearly got tangled in the seat belt as he tried to step out of the car. "Shit, you weren't kidding."

And Steve felt like a fucking child as Hop reached over him to unbuckle him, and actually *help him* out of the car.

He finally noticed the truck parked behind his car, and got himself tucked into the passenger seat as Hopper moved the beamer to the spot he indicated, double checking he locked it before jogging back to the truck.

The ride was silent all the way to the hospital, Steve tying his fingers up in knots and trying not to throw up.

Hopper didn't just drop him off, he actually walked with Steve into the building, escorted him all the way to the exam room.

He sat in the chair Robin usually occupied, settling his hat on his knee.

Wait, he's fucking *on duty*.

"You don't have to stay. I could, like, call the station when I'm finished here."

"I've got nowhere to be. Not a lotta shit goes down in this town on the off-season." He smiled grimly at Steve, who just nodded blankly.

And Owens took that time to break the awkward quiet between them, opening the door with Steve's file tucked under his arm.

"Steven! Good to see you again. Let's get into that head of yours, shall we?" He shook hands with Hop, turning back to Steve with a grin that was probably meant to be jovial and endearing. "Sorry to see that girlfriend of yours won't be joining us today. Trouble in paradise?"

"We're just friends. And she's working." His voice felt heavy, like it took effort just to make himself speak.

"Doc, for my own sake, Harrington here hasn't quite gotten me up to speed with the testing today."

There was a short rap on the door, and a few nurses entered the room, bringing a rolling metal tray with a few tubes and a long syringe, and a large machine, wires spilling out the side.

Steve barely reacted as they took his blood, pressing his shoulders gently to coax him into a supine position, relaxing against the exam table.

"We're going to begin with an E.E.G., or, an electroencephalography."

Something sparked in Hopper's eyes.

"That's what Will had, right? To monitor brain activity, or what have you."

"Exactly. We use them to understand and diagnose seizure disorders. Steven'll be here for about an hour or so." He washed his hands quickly at the sink in the corner, turning back to Steve and looking at him pensively. It made Steve feel oddly self-conscious. "It's completely painless." He smiled weakly at Steve, maybe misjudging his general discomfort at being looked at for prolonged periods of time as fear.

Which sure, he's got some *real* fear surrounding this test, but not the test itself. He's more dreading the follow-up appointment he's gonna have to have for his results to be read and explained. If he's got epilepsy, or not. If this is what the rest of his life is gonna look like, or not. If he can drive or go to college. If it'll all just get *worse*.

One of the nurses, the one with a nice round face that had taken his blood a few moments ago, was marking out spots on his head, along his hairline.

And before he knew it, small sticky pads were being stuck to him, one on each spot she had marked out, and more dotting back through his hair, the nurse smoothing it down and parting it awkwardly in many places to get the little pads as close to his scalp as possible.

"Alright. You ready, Steven?" Owens didn't wait for a response before he began fiddling with the large machine, bringing it to life.

It was kind of like what Steve saw in a video once about seismographs. A little arm scratching out tremors in the Earth on a sliding sheet of paper.

Only this one was detecting tremors in his brain. Tremors and errors and everything that was going wrong in there.

"So, Chief. What brings you in here with Steven today?"

Steve wanted to tell Owens just to call him *Steve*, but he kinda feels like it's past the point of when he should've corrected him, and now,

it'd be kinda weird.

"Drivin' the kid in. Can't have him crashing his car. I think the last thing his head needs is another bonk."

It made Steve smile, nearly made him laugh as the machine scratched away beside him.

"Good to see you've taken my advice."

"Robin drives me almost everywhere. We work the same shifts and she picks me up after school. It works pretty okay." The whirring of the machine kinda made Steve want to fall asleep.

"Your parents don't drive you?" Hopper looked a little *too* interested. Steve tried to play it cool.

"My dad works quite a lot." Hopper tightened his jaw and Steve kinda felt like a little kid again. "He, uh, travels for work a lot. And my mom likes to go."

It was like the air in the room totally went cold.

"Kid, do they even know you're here today?"

"Yes! I called them last night. Pretty much begged my mom to fly in but she-"

And it was the first Owens had seen one of Steve's seizures for himself.

He cut off mid sentence, his eyes, that had just been wide and clear a second before, went blank, and dim, nearly rolling back in his head. The E.E.G. noted the seizure, tracking brainwaves that were even more abnormal than had been presented already. His jaw worked as though he was trying to speak, and as quickly as it happened, Steve seemed to snap back into himself.

So, maybe emotional duress? Stress? That should definitely be examined as a possible trigger.

Owens scribbled that down on Steve's chart as Steve shook himself,

smiling benignly at Hopper.

“Sorry. Uh, lost my train of thought, there.”

And maybe Hop was able to see that talking about Steve’s family could bring on another, or maybe he just got scared of watching Steve have a seizure and decided to walk on eggshells, but he just smiled back. Brought up a story about Eleven from earlier in the week. How the two of them had played a game of Monopoly that lasted nearly six hours and had both of them close to tears by the end of it.

The test was okay by Steve’s standards. Pretty easy on his end. All he had to do was lay back and let the machine do work. He’s pretty sure he had an episode or two, based on the way Hopper would go all pale and look at Steve like he was sorry for him.

Hopper had to step out near the middle of the test to make a phone call, Steve figured to the station to let them know he was otherwise occupied, or something like that. Or at least, that’s what Steve hoped, and not that Hopper was putting calls in to his father’s work and getting in touch with him via his secretary, or something awful like that.

He’d rather not have the Chief of Police call his parents from the hospital to scold them for not accompanying Steve to his Big Scary Medical Test.

He felt about ready to fall asleep when the machine was finally turned off and nurse returned, removing all the sticky pads as gently as possible from his head.

Owens looked over the paper carefully, folding along the perforations and clipping it against Steve’s chart.

“So, Steven, can we see you a few days from now to go over these results?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Go ahead and schedule that with the front desk,” he finished in the doorway, giving Hop a curt wave and swishing off to something else.

“You ready to be home, kid?”

“Fuckin’ absolutely.”

That made Hop huff something close to a laugh, and he kinda fluttered about while Steve stood up from the examination table, like he wanted to help Steve up, help him manoeuvre around.

Steve went through all the typical stuff at the front desk, handing over his father’s credit card along with their insurance information, scheduling another appointment three days from then.

He was tired, and just felt so fucking awkward that Hopper had been here to witness Steve’s prolonged physical breakdown.

Hopper led him out of the hospital and back to the truck, driving him home with the radio playing quietly. Steve stared out the window, watching raindrops sprinkle onto the car and rush down the window.

They passed Steve’s car a few blocks away from his house, and by the time they pulled up, Steve was *almost* too tired to notice another car parked in front of his house.

But he couldn’t ignore Joyce’s tight hug when he made it to his porch, and suddenly Hopper’s phone call made sense.

Will was standing behind her like a shadow, holding a baking dish and three clear glass bowls, all stacked up and covered in tin foil.

They brought him dinner.

It kinda made Steve wanna cry.

He fumbled with his keys letting them all inside, tugging awkwardly at the sleeves of his sweatshirt as he led Joyce to the kitchen.

Hop grunted something about walking to get Steve’s car, easing the keys out of his hands and taking off down the road.

“Steve, Honey, why don’t you just take a seat. We’ve got this.” She smiled and pushed him softly towards the kitchen table.

And he *really* wanted to help her heat everything up. For fuck sake's she brought him *dinner*, he wants to do something, but he's so goddamn tired.

He sat down slowly, tucking his left leg up under him as he watched Joyce and Will in his kitchen.

They set the dishes to heat up slowly in the oven, going through cabinets to find dishes and flatware to set the table.

Steve's family almost never ate in the kitchen.

When his parents were home, they almost always sat together in the formal dining room, eating in stilted silence before heading their separate ways.

It was kinda nice, hearing the two of them talk softly to one another, letting Steve just kinda zone out a little bit, tracing the wood grain of the table with the pads of his fingers.

Until his front door creaked open in a way that only Robin could make happen, and he was being hugged tightly from behind.

"Steve, I came as soon as I could. I'm so so sorry I couldn't come. How was the test? Did they tell you anything yet? Keith was being *such* an ass today, I almost punched him right in the-" She cut herself off when she noticed the Byers standing near the oven, still clinging onto Steve from behind. "Uh, hi. Sorry," she stammered. She didn't do well being taken off guard. Steve sometimes thought it was kinda funny.

"Hi, Sweetheart. Let me just set you a place for dinner. Hop's moving Steve's car, he'll be back in a second and this should be hot enough to eat."

Robin finally relinquished Steve, keeping one hand on his shoulder that Steve covered with his own.

"Oh, uh, that's okay. I just wanted to check on Steve, I don't wanna intrude-"

Joyce waved her hand, shaking her head.

“We invited ourselves into his home. As long as Steve says it’s okay, you’re more than welcome. There’s *plenty*.”

“Steve looked up at Robin, pretending to think it over.

“I don’t *know*,” he sighed dramatically. “I don’t really *like you*, so I don’t want you to stay.” He scrunched up his face when she hit his shoulder. “Take a seat, Buck.”

They could hear heavy footsteps in the hall, the door being closed quietly behind Hopper, and the jingle of Steve’s keys being deposited in the glass bowl on the small sidetable next to the door.

Robin stood to help Joyce and Will bring all the dishes over to the table, and *fuck*, Steve’s hungry. He hasn’t eaten all day since most of it was spent feeling like he could throw up his spleen.

But Joyce had brought a rich lasagna, and the creamiest mashed potatoes Steve has ever tasted, and these fucking string beans that were so good and *crisp*, Steve must’ve demolished half the container of them.

Conversation was kept light and nice, and Steve figured Hopper had filled Joyce in on the nitty-gritty of the test and everything to do with what Steve has been not so subtly hiding from everyone but Robin.

It was still nice to let the sleeping dog lie, even if Steve did find himself no doubt post-seizure with his hand sloppily in his mashed potatoes and everyone staring at him.

And after finishing two of the brownies Joyce had brought, Steve was struck with such a huge wall of *tired*, it was like he could barely even keep his eyes open.

“Well, we should take our leave.” Joyce leaned back in her chair, Will looking just as sleepy as Steve felt.

“Seriously, Mrs. B. Thank you so much for this. *So much*.” Steve didn’t even have the words in him to explain his gratitude, but sometimes he thinks Joyce has the ability to read his mind, so it works out.

She just squeezed him in another tight hug, Will following with one of his own before Robin walked them to the door.

“You call if you need anything, okay? Even if it’s just some company. El’s been on this real *Miami Vice* kick, she’ll talk to anyone that’ll listen about that damn show.”

It made Steve nearly laugh, picturing El sitting in front of the television, watching *Miami Vice* with as much determination as she does everything.

“Thank you, Hop. Today probably would’ve been a lot more *shit* if you hadn’t’ve seen my car.”

“Anytime, Kid. And quit tryna hide that shit. We’ve all been fucked up by what happened. Doesn’t mean you’re broke or somethin’.”

And Steve really fucking *doesn’t* wanna cry anymore today.

He blinked rapidly to keep the tears at bay, Hopper doing him a solid and studying his own watch.

“Alright, my little twerp’s been at the Wheeler’s all day. I gotta pick her up. Take it easy, alright?”

“Yes, Sir.” Steve gave him a lazily sarcastic salute.

Hopper rolled his eyes, putting his hat back on.

Steve slunk to the couch as Robin locked up behind the chief, flopping down near his feet.

“I brought *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as an apology gift.”

“I’m gonna make you watch it a million times.”

Robin slapped his leg, a gesture that was immediately undercut by her draping a soft blanket delicately over him.

“Marion Ravenwood is hot enough I stay invested.”

She sat back down after putting in the tape.

“So, how was it today?” Her voice was *way* too casual.

“It was okay. Test was fine enough, and hanging out with everyone was good.”

“Are you, like, gonna maybe reach out to them more? Because, you know, they *know* now.”

Steve chewed on the inside of his cheek, tugging at a loose thread in the blanket.

“Probably. Not that you don’t do a lot for me, but, uh, it *was* kinda nice to have grown ups around.”

“You *know* I’d do anything for you, but I think it was kinda nice too. Especially-” She cut herself off, letting the *especially since your mom couldn’t be bothered to show up* hang in the air between them.

The opening trailers had begun on the rented tape, and Steve closed his eyes, snuggling deeper into the couch.

“Thanks, Rob. Love you.”

“Yeah, Dingus. Love you too.”